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IS RUSSIA WINNING THE BATTLE FOR EUROPE?

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DATE: 19 MAR 81

BY:

A Great American Soldier Lays the Stark

Facts on the Line: Unless German Divisions

Are Now Armed and Incorporated into the

European Army--In Spite of French Forebodings--

The Scales Will Tip in Russia's Favor. And

The Deadline is Now.

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IS RUSSIA WINNING THE BATTLE FOR EUROPE?

By General of the Army Omar N. Bradley

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

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Late one rainy afternoon in September of 1952, General Ridgway and

I were standing beside a small, grey-stucco German farmhouse just west of the River Rhine. Before us, the terrain sloped gently downward to a large potato patch with woods nearby. The roar of airplane engines and the sharp reports of opening parachutes filled the skies. Vivid splashes of color spread across the somber landscape as the red, white, orange and blue 'chutes lowered their burdens---nearly one thousand crack French paratroopers, their field pieces, ammunition, food, medical supplies, even trucks lashed to wooden platforms which struck the muddy earth of the potato patch with an echoing thunderclap.

The airborne Frenchmen quickly organized their equipment and took cover in the woodland. The U. S. Air Force planes which had dropped them disappeared in the distance. Soon the noise died down until once again the only sound we could hear was the quiet drizzle of the rain on the tile roof of the farmhouse. Then a regiment of U. S. Army ground forces charged onto the scene. Small-arms fire crackled, the field pieces roared, demolition charges geysered German farmland into the air---while umpires rushed about to decide how this battle of blank ammunition was going. For this was an important exercise in the first large-scale military maneuvers to be held by the nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The problem in this particular action was to wipe out a Rhine-crossing bridgehead before westbound "enemy" troops could exploit it and thus be set to complete a theoretical conquest of Germany---with France next.

2--Bradley

In a window of the farmhouse, an old German wearing a battered black felt hat propped his elbows on the sill and stolidly surveyed the ruin of his potato patch. He puffed on a home-made cigarette, stroked his grey, stubbly beard reflectively, and summed up his impression of this foreign troop rehearsal for the "liberation" of his farm.

"Ach!" he exclaimed. "It is a crazy world. Everyone is defending the Fatherland except her own sons."

Unhappily, the German farmer's remark is just as valid today as it was when he made it more than eighteen months ago. In fact, three and one half years have elapsed since the defensive ministers of NATO agreed it was impossible to defend western Europe against the Soviets without an effective German military contribution to the west's rearmament program. The Germans are ready and willing, and enough U. S. heavy equipment for the first six right now. But quibbling and delay have now brought German divisions is available to the point that the Soviet Union is dangerously close to winning a major strategic victory without firing a shot. this situation

When I relinquished the chairmanship of the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff last August, I did not anticipate that the program for the defense of western Europe would be in a state of such crisis in this spring of 1954 that the United States would be forced, simply as a matter of military realism, to think of certain dreadful alternatives to the orderly buildup of western strength on the European continent as previously agreed upon in the deliberations of NATO. I shall explore these alternatives later in this article. First, however, I should like to make a report on the existing situation--a report I feel obligated to make at this time because the crisis is acute, because my past experience with NATO is an intimate one which in some respects is unique, and because my present military status permits me a degree

3--Bradley

of public candor not always available to one while still in government.

Western Europe is not just a piece of real estate which could be traded for time--not in any World War III. Its resources, greater in most respects than those of the entire communist bloc, constitute the balance of power between the Soviet and the civilized worlds, the potential difference between freedom and enslavement. For example, the United States at present has approximately twice the raw steel production of all the Soviet nations. But Soviet acquisition of the steel mills of a conquered western Europe could turn this great advantage into a sizeable deficit. Estimates by any other yardstick--raw materials, population, inventive and scientific personnel, industrial production, economic strength--come to the same conclusion: That western Europe, conquered, weights the balance in favor of communism. The defense of western Europe is therefore almost of as much concern to the United States as the defense of New York, Detroit, or the Panama Canal. If western Europe should tempt the Kremlin aggressors by its weakness and fall into Soviet hands, the future of the United States would not be pleasant to contemplate--not to mention the even more immediate future of the western European populations.

Having served with many of the illustrious French generals, having held the field leadership of the American armies in the liberation of France in World War II, I have a deep and abiding respect for the French and for their leadership in Europe. But having witnessed the devastating effects of the atomic bomb, and having seen the motion pictures of our 1952 bomb tests, I feel that another liberation of Europe, in the atomic hydrogen bomb era, would be a strategic impossibility.

4--Bradley

Tactical atomic weapons--bombs, missiles, cannon--could on the other hand be of major importance in the defense, as opposed to the liberation, of western Europe. The United States has led the world in this field. It could do more in this respect toward strengthening our European allies, including France, and I shall elaborate on this thought presently. But tactical atomic weapons are of no real value without sufficient ground strength to force an invading army to mass itself into a suitable target. The achievement of that sufficient ground strength in western Europe will be realized only when the German contribution, so long delayed, becomes available.

The first objective of the United States, in this age of atomic and hydrogen bombs, is the prevention of war. We can never be sure that the Soviets believe this, but we do want our allies to know it. Two principal deterrents to war have been created since the prostration of Europe in the last war: (1) The North Atlantic alliance, and (2) the U. S. Strategic Air Command with its nuclear weapons and the ability to deliver them en masse. One without the other is not enough.

The Soviet Union might have neutralized our Strategic Air Command by agreeing in the United Nations to complete atomic disarmament--when the Russians had few A-bombs and we had many. But the Soviet leaders could not figure their way around the respected ground and air capability of NATO. So they had to stop the progress of the NATO build-up, began so hopefully by the western allies in 1949, and now slowed to a puzzled gait in 1954. They struck, logically, at the heart of the matter--the German contribution.

The Soviets have pressured the Germans. They have propagandized the Italians. Above all, they have sought to tempt the French. At the recent

5--Bradley

foreign ministers' conference in Berlin, they held out the hope of settling the Indo-China war at the Geneva conference scheduled to begin April 26-- with the obvious objective of giving the French a reason for further delay on agreeing to German rearmament.

The simple military fact of the matter is that a strong, defensible western Europe needs both France and Germany. The sole interest of the United States is a Franco-German rapprochement in their mutual interest and in our own. After all, because of an accident of geography, France can count on German forces to defend France while defending Germany herself. Who would benefit more from a reasonable degree of German defensive strength than France itself?

The problem is one of emotion rather than logic. To state is baldly, some Frenchmen seem to fear the Germans more than they fear the Russians. I recall vividly that a meeting of NATO defense ministers, held in Washington in October of 1950, was thrown into an uproar when we got down to the hard question of how we were to achieve an admittedly essential contribution of German divisions to Europe's defenses.

The United States proposed a rearmed West Germany participating in NATO. Jules Moch, then the French minister of defense, exploded in protest. Mme. Moch, present as his adviser, supported him vehemently. The suggestion was utterly unthinkable. M. Moch, a leader of the French Resistance in World War II, had been imprisoned by the Nazis and subsequently escaped from France. Mme. Moch was forced to flee to Switzerland. Their elder son was killed by the Gestapo. They knew of Nazi racial persecutions at first hand. Their own bitter memories of Germans in uniform are shared, in varying degrees, by millions of their countrymen in a nation thrice invaded by Germans within a period of seventy years.

6--Bradley

Can an American understand the depth of such emotions? I think I can, for I recall how I once learned that the War between the States---the American civil war---was not really over. Upon first being ordered to Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1925, I found that the one small army marching through Georgia under Sherman in 1864 had left a deep and lasting hurt, still felt so many decades afterward. When I contrast this with three German invasions and occupations of France, I believe I can readily appreciate French feelings.

But understandable as it was, the effect of M. Moch's emotional upheaval was such that additional meetings had to be held in London and Brussels the following month to pick up the pieces of the shattered conference. By the time of the Brussels session, the atmosphere on the German question had changed from one of despair to one of hope. For the French had advanced the concept of a European Defense Community--an organization within NATO, composed of France, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy, which would raise an international army made up of troops from these six nations--the nations which, logically, must furnish the bulk of the manpower for defending western Europe in any event. Control of this international army and the licensing of its arms production would not rest in any single nation, but in an international commissariat or defense department which in turn would fit in its defense plans with those of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe, the top continental command post of NATO. The EDC would also have its own tactical air force and, after a period of transition, a common defense budget to which the six nations would contribute.

Let me emphasize that the European Defense Community, or EDC, is not an American idea; it is a French proposal, designed primarily to make German re-armament acceptable because it would be controlled. Let me also note that the need for a German contribution to European defense is not just an American

7.-Bradley

notion, but the result of a NATO-wide agreement. It might be added as an ironical footnote that the communists are partially responsible for the EDC they are now trying to kill, for they started the Korean war, which in turn caused a sense of danger and urgency in the U. S. and Europe contributing to the decision that Germany must be rearmed.

France's NATO allies accepted the French EDC proposal in principle, in December of 1950. Germany, too, was willing to go along with EDC as an alternative to the original idea of NATO membership for the Bonn government. But it was not until May of 1952 that the EDC treaty was signed subject to ratification by the parliaments of the six nations. Now, two more years later, the Netherlands, Belgian and West German parliaments have ratified the treaty, but Luxembourg, Italy, and France have not. Italy and Luxembourg appear to be waiting for France. Why has France not acted?

Part of the answer may be found in the protracted debate between December of 1950 and May of 1952 over the form in which German troops would be organized under EDC. France at first proposed that the German units be made no larger than battalions. This was rejected as militarily unworkable. Then, at a subsequent meeting of NATO military authorities, came a French proposal that EDC divisions be made up of three regimental combat teams of different nationalities--for example, one French, one German and one Belgian.

During a recess of the meeting at which this proposal was made, I remarked, "Gentlemen, now that we are off the record, I have a suggestion. Each of you ~~commanded~~ a division or more in the last war. So would each of you who would be willing to lead a division in battle with regiments of three different nationalities kindly raise his hand?"

8--Bradley

No one, including the French general present, raised his hand. This incident disposed of the proposal, for it illustrated, dramatically, what all of us knew in our hearts as men of military experience--that an international army, if it is to be efficient, must be broken by nationalities units into/no smaller than a division. Differences of language, temperament, procedure, habit and training would otherwise produce only wild disorder. The fact that the French had to adjust to the idea gradually, starting with battalions, until they were willing to face the prospect of German divisions, is a reflection of the French national fears which are no less time-consuming for the fact that their root causes are easily identified.

9--Bradley

It is not that the French are lacking in political leaders of courage and determination. For example, at the NATO meeting in Lisbon, in February of 1952, prospects for an EDC treaty seemed dismal. The issue was whether France could commit herself to raising twelve and one-third divisions so her forces in EDC would, among other considerations, be slightly larger than the proposed new German army^{of twelve divisions.} The problem was financial. Robert A. Lovett, then the U. S. Secretary of Defense, explained that he had already squeezed out the last dollar of American funds available for military aid to France. To meet the goal, France would have to increase her military budget--and, it appeared, it would be political suicide to increase the French military budget by one more franc.

There the matter rested when I was summoned rather mysteriously to a dinner that evening which my aide, his French opposite number and an American radio correspondent had arranged, explaining only that they wanted me to cancel any other engagement I might have. I discovered that the other guest was none other than the Premier of France, then Edgar Faure. I think he was as surprised as I. It was a pleasant social occasion, and it was also the first opportunity M. Faure had had to sit down with a military man, in an atmosphere of private conversation rather than the tension of a formal international conference, to discuss the military necessities of the situation.

As the evening concluded, M. Faure sighed and said, "Very well, I shall announce tomorrow morning that we shall raise the twelve and one-third divisions and that we shall increase our military budget to meet the costs. But I must tell you that my government will fall within thirty days."

10--Bradley

Next morning, the Premier was as good as his word, and the signing of the EDC treaty took place in Paris three months later. By then, as M. Faure had predicted, his government had fallen--it lasted only four days after the NATO meeting instead of thirty. The interesting point is that while M. Faure made the great personal sacrifice of taking a step he knew would turn him out of office, the French honored the commitment he made and continue to honor it today, even while delaying treaty ratification. This incident illustrates the political realities which any French government faces in dealing with the vexed question of German rearmament. I might add that the fact I have dwelt at some length upon a personal experience with M. Faure does not by any means indicate that I am insensible of the high courage and fortitude of Premier Laniel and Foreign Minister Georges Bidault in the difficult roles they presently play with respect to EDC.

I am convinced from my numerous associations with prominent Frenchmen and American observers that a large majority of Frenchmen are not opposed to German rearmament per se. I am told that seventy percent of the French people would accept some form of it, and I know that the high military authorities of France are convinced of the need for a German contribution. What, then, are the inhibitions on French ratification of the EDC treaty?

Many Frenchmen oppose EDC because they fear it would mean subordination of France within a larger European community in which France's historic identity would be lost. This is the principal nationalistic argument against EDC. I can readily understand the fears of my French military colleagues that EDC might mean the partial disappearance of the French armed forces as they have existed in the past. But all nations must accept some limitations on their sovereignty in meeting a common need, particularly when that need

11--Bradley

could be a matter of national life or death. The United States, for example, is no longer a free agent; it must keep its policies in accord with those of thirteen NATO allies, and its military strategy concerning Europe is subject not only to the direction of the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, but to the NATO Standing Group, and NATO's European command, SHAPE. I feel that the United States can go even farther in cooperating, for example, by adopting the Belgian infantry rifle already accepted as standard by our western European allies.

Another French fear of EDC is that it might become a vehicle for German domination of western Europe, including France. This contention is difficult to understand, for it is precisely what the EDC, beyond all other suggested methods of German rearmament, is designed to avoid. The plain fact is that German rearmament is coming, one way or another, sooner or later, and it would seem to me to be far safer, from the French viewpoint, to have that rearmament under control of EDC decisions on which the French would have a veto.

A strong and reviv^{ing} Germany will inevitably play an influential role in European affairs. Indeed, it is French recognition of this fact which creates French fears. But this development cannot be met by avoiding the issue of rearmament or raising the ^{spurious} cry, as did one French statesman, that EDC is "a French march to American music."

Would a rearmed Germany drag Europe into a new war by attacking the Soviet Union? This is some risk under any form of German rearmament, but the far greater risk is a Soviet take-over of a disarmed West Germany.

12--Bradley

The point is that the security of free Europe is indivisible and the best way to lay the ghost of German aggression is to deprive Germany of an independent military establishment through EDC.

The recent Berlin conference has made it painfully clear, to any not already convinced, that the Soviet Union will not under any circumstances voluntarily give up control over East Germany. Mr. Molotov has answered, far better than I could, the theory also heard in France that ratification of EDC might prevent a German settlement. For he has made it evident that the Soviets will retreat from East Germany only when they are convinced they must.

A strong European Defense Community would advance the date of that happy event, distant as it may now seem.

France has other important concerns in this matter, including a desire to obtain a favorable settlement of her dispute with Germany over the Saar Basin as a pre-condition to ratification of the EDC treaty. A basis for French-German agreement on this issue was achieved last month after long delay. Uppermost at the moment, however, is the issue of whether ratification would impair the possibility of securing a settlement of the conflict in Indo-China.

Here we see the blackmailing nature of communist power politics at its most naked. Make no mistake about it--the Soviet Union understands the importance of the European Defense Community, and the best evidence is her efforts to defeat it. Russia has made a show of easing east-west tensions, offered trade to our NATO allies, dangled a non-aggression pact with the USSR before the European NATO countries, all with the purpose of undermining the EDC. And finally, we have the clear implication from the communists that if the French want to end the war in Indo-China, they had better let

13--Bradley

EDC die on the vine.

No American could fail to sympathize with the French desire to relieve herself of the burden of the eight-year-old Indo-China war, least of all an American military man who for the last three years of his active duty lived daily with the casualty lists from Korea. The United States, too, has a substantial stake in the Indo-Chinese conflict. But the whole history of international experience with the communist bloc has proven, time and time and time again, that only those negotiations undertaken from a position of western strength have any prospect of success for the west. As always, the communists at Geneva will be playing upon allied disunity. Here a functioning EDC represents a strength the communists understand and respect, while an unratified EDC gives the Soviets a weapon.

What more can the United States do to aid the cause of EDC, to prevent the significant victory that international communism would win by default should EDC fail? This nation has already poured six billions of dollars in Marshall Plan and military aid into France, is pumping more than a billion dollars additional military aid for the war in Indo-China through the economy of continental France. We have supported five U. S. divisions plus a division of American constabulary in Europe for years, and we have built up air strength on the continent--I hardly need labor the point. With specific reference to EDC, we have accepted virtually every French demand for modifications, stipulations, protocols, and agreements designed to counter French fears that a rearmed Germany might prove to be a Frankenstein's monster which would turn on its creators.

14--Bradley

Perhaps there is still more that we could do. I believe we should be willing to extend to 50 years our commitment to the NATO Pact, as necessary to insure that it would run as long as EDC. We could also hope that the British would be willing to commit their forces on the continent to the European army.

The success of EDC is a matter of such overriding importance that whatever is needed to insure that success must be done. I have long advocated that our Atomic Energy Act be liberalized so we can go further in sharing knowledge of nuclear weapons with our allies, and President Eisenhower recently urged Congress to take this step. Information on what the bomb is, how to use it, how to get the best results from it, is necessary so our allies can incorporate the bomb in their military plans. Once our allies have the benefit of all the atomic information their ground commanders and their air commanders need, the next logical step would be to make tactical atomic weapons available to our allies or at least to pledge their instant availability for support in the event of war. France, for example, has a superb new jet fighter known as the Mystere which can be modified for handling tactical A-bombs.

But how can we expect the Congress to take even the first step, of making more atomic information available, so long as France continues to shun her own brain-child, the EDC? The Congressional attitude on EDC was made evident in adoption of the Richards amendment to the Mutual Security Act of 1953. This amendment, now American law, provided that fifty percent of U. S. military aid appropriated in 1953 for NATO should be withheld until EDC is in effect. The practical effect of the amendment is that all American military aid to the six EDC nations will soon cease unless (a) Congress repeals the amendment (which is most unlikely) or (b) EDC is ratified.

15--Bradley

Thus the eventual availability of tactical atomic weapons for use by our allies and the continued flow of U. S. military assistance both hinge on the ratification of EDC. France need have no fear that the United States will withdraw her forces from Europe so long as there is hope of holding the continent. The real threat of a U. S. withdrawal would arise only from a conviction that the continent could not be defended. Thus it seems to me, in the light of my experience with NATO which began from the moment of NATO's birth, that French ratification of the EDC treaty and a start on German rearmament are precisely the steps most needed at this moment to revive NATO confidence and to achieve an adequate defense. If the French are worried about an American "retreat to isolationism," they have the opportunity to administer the best possible antidote.

But as a soldier, I can see only three alternatives which would be open to the United States if EDC should fail.

We could go back to our original proposal that West Germany be made a member of NATO. France would undoubtedly veto this step.

We could rearm Western Germany by ourselves, or with the help of Great Britain if London wished to go along with this proposition, but with or without British help, we could do it.

Or we could make the "agonizing reappraisal" of our military position which could only, in all military logic, lead to withdrawal of U. S. troops from the European continent to Great Britain, the Azores, Spain, Northern Africa, Greece and Turkey--in other words shift to a strategy of peripheral defense of Europe.

One has only to look squarely at these alternatives and their potential repercussions to understand why I feel so strongly the failure of EDC would hand the Soviet Union a major strategic victory in Europe without pulling a single trigger. Yet if an adequate western European defense cannot be

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16--Bradley

achieved, for lack of German troops, what else can we do except to consider the alternatives?

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